

We left of three weeks ago with the cliff hanger ending of the ship in which Paul was a prisoner bound for Rome anchored at night off an unknown coast. Paul had said that an angel told him all would survive but the boat would be lost. They had been in the storm for two weeks and had thrown everything overboard to lighten the ship to ride higher in the waves and hopefully get over any reefs. Anchored off a shore at night there was still the fear of being beaten to death by waves pounding on rocks or a reef. I've been snorkeling on a shallow reef when the tide was going out and had a similar fear. Being slammed up against coral can do a lot of damage to a body very quickly.

³⁹ Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. ⁴⁰ So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. Acts 27:39-40

They were going to try to steer the ship through the reef to the beach. This is part of the description that helped Robert Cornuke to locate the anchors they left in the ocean. With the beach in sight their hopes were raised, but the drama was not yet over.

Sometimes we think that our long trial is almost over and that we see the light at the end of the tunnel, but then there is one more hurdle. That is when the enemy tries his hardest to get us to give up. He knows victory is just ahead, but he has one last chance to make you discouraged and give up hope. That is when we make some of our worst mistakes. Don't let go of your hope even if things don't turn out like you were expecting (Hebrews 6:19ⁱ). Even if your ship runs aground and it looks like you'll never make it to that beach, trust God. He has promised to never leave or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:8ⁱⁱ).

⁴¹ But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. Acts 27:41 The Greek text mentions a place between two seas, which was another clue to finding those ancient anchors from this boat. Two currents met just off this coast causing waves from two different directions to meet. Running aground was what they feared. Though they had lightened the ship, it still ran too deep and struck the reef where the waves began tearing the back of the boat apart. Having come so far the next moments would decide whether they lived or died.

⁴² The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.

⁴³ But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, Acts 27:42-43 If a prisoner of Rome escaped, the guard could be executed. Rather than take that risk, the soldiers wanted to just execute all the prisoners. But as we saw when they were in Sidon (Acts 26:3ⁱⁱⁱ), this centurion had grown to respect Paul. He saw something in Paul that had only grown in appreciation over the difficult voyage. Paul had told them the angel that visited him had said they would all survive without any harm. Our

relationship with Jesus will be evident in how we face difficulty. We can all smile and look like good Christians when things go our way, but the trials bring out the real depth of our relationship with Christ.

The centurion ordered those who could swim to head for shore first. There is a fascinating term used in the book of Hebrews for Jesus. He is called the founder or captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10^{iv}). The term also means a trailblazer. It was used in this kind of nautical situation for the best swimmer who would go first with a rope from the ship to the shore to make a way for those who were stranded to survive.

It is a great picture of what Jesus did for us. We are all shipwrecked on the sea of this fallen world. The waves of sin and despair threaten to beat us to death on the rocks of judgment, drowning us in our sin. None of us could make it to shore. Many have tried but even those individuals, whom some people *claim* to have made it, are still in their graves. But Jesus took that rope of salvation into the sea, taking our sins upon Himself and made it through death and the judgment of God and walked out on the shore of resurrected life. He secured that rope for us. He not only made a way, but He is the way (John 14:6^v). By faith we take hold of that rope and head for heaven's shore (Hebrews 6:19^{vi}). The waves cover our heads at times, but if we won't let go, we too will arrive on that shore with Jesus.

⁴⁴ and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land. Acts 27:44 Those who couldn't swim took planks of wood and floated in. Thus, surfboards were invented. 😊 Just as the angel told Paul, all survived but the ship was lost. Once again Paul could have said, "Now do you believe me?" What an adventure! Not an adventure any of us would like to try.

God allowed this. Perhaps Satan was trying to drown Paul. But God always frustrates Satan and brings some unforeseen good out of what seems to be a tragedy (Genesis 50:20^{vii}). God sees us through the storms of life. We can't always say we will be unharmed, but we can always say God will see us through. Just don't give up along the way. Keep your eyes on Jesus and your trust in His many promises (Isaiah 43:2^{viii}).

¹ After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. Acts 28:1 A fictional movie about Paul's final days was just recently released, *Paul the Apostle*. How timely for us. It was well done and I encourage you to see it, though it isn't for the faint of heart. Whenever you see critics pan a Christian movie while the public rates it highly, you can know it's pretty good. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14^{ix}). The movie was filmed on Malta.

² The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. Acts 28:2 God had a welcoming party there for these wet sailors complete with a fire to warm them up and dry them out. It was a more warming welcoming party than the one Jesus received when He went through a storm on Galilee on the way to the Decapolis region (Mark 5:1-2^x).

³ When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. Acts 28:3 And just when you thought all the danger was past, a viper came out of the wood and bit Paul. I'd like to first have us note that the great Apostle whose words had just come to pass didn't think himself above the menial task of gathering wood. Whenever you see leaders who can't help in ordinary ways, you can know they've started to think too highly of themselves (Romans 12:3^{xi}).

From being caught in this horrible storm, driven at sea for two weeks, having escaped running aground earlier, they ran aground at night and just survived getting through the waves to shore, when a venomous snake latched onto Paul's hand. Satan just never gives up. But neither does God (Psalm 121:3^{xii})!

⁴ When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. Acts 28:4-5 The natives believed in Providence and Providence was indeed at work, but not in the way they imagined. They thought justice had caught up with this prisoner, as if he somehow cheated death but that death was about to have the final word. Paul shook the snake off into the fire, and he was fine. God miraculously protected Paul from the poison (Mark 16:18^{xiii}).

If God isn't done with you there is nothing that can kill you. Both George Washington and General Paton stood in a hail of bullets when other soldiers hid in trenches because these men knew God had a calling on their life and would protect them until their job was done. God wasn't done working through Paul and was going to use what the enemy meant for evil for something good instead. Attacks often mean we are right where we should be. If we weren't doing something substantial for God's kingdom, the enemy of our soul would leave us alone. When we are God's instrument we become a target, but we also have Jesus as our shield and defender (2 Samuel 22:3^{xiv}). Anything that gets to us is allowed by God for our good, for our spiritual growth and to increase in our faith.

⁶ They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Acts 28:6 The situation went from apparent tragedy to an opportunity to share the power of God unto salvation. Surely Paul used the situation to share Christ with them. But there was still more that God was going to do through this shipwreck, more than anyone would have suspected. God often does more through difficulties than through fair weather and seeming blessings.

We wouldn't have the book of Job were it not for trials. The book of Esther is about one horrible threat that turned into a victory. Persecution has always strengthened the church. Missionaries were driven out of China and when China opened up again, instead of finding faith in Christ to have vanished, there was a vibrant church nearly one

hundred million strong. Moses was discouraged when the people whined about the manna and wanted meat. When God promised to give them meat for a month Moses doubted it was possible. ²³ *And the LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD's hand shortened? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not."* Numbers 11:23 Do we think Almighty God struggles to fulfill His Word? Nothing is too hard for Him (Luke 1:37^{xv}). And Jesus said that if you have faith, nothing will be impossible for you (Matthew 17:20^{xvi}). You can persevere through whatever God allows to come your way, because He is with you (1 Corinthians 10:13^{xvii})!

⁷ *Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days.* Acts 28:7 Publius would have to have been a very wealthy man to entertain 276 men for three days. But he also must have been a man with a generous heart and seeker of truth. This too was the hand of Providence taking the gospel to the island of Malta.

⁸ *It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. ⁹ And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.* Acts 28:8-9 Publius kindness was repaid with the healing of his father, and the healing was another opportunity. The rest of the islanders came to be healed! Wow! Paul had a very powerful healing ministry. We can be certain that with the healing Paul shared with the entire island the gospel of Jesus and the healing of sin sick hearts.

¹⁰ *They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed.* Acts 28:10 For three months Paul was a powerful witness to the 275 who were on the ship with him and the entire island of Malta. How many became followers of Christ because of this shipwreck? We don't know, but certainly it must have been a great number of them. The islanders gratefully provided all the crews' needs for the rest of the voyage toward Rome.

What I'd like for you to hold on to from this portion of Scripture is the way God works despite everything the world can throw at us. Jesus told us that in the world we would have tribulation, but that we should be of good cheer because He has overcome the world (John 16:33^{xviii}). That takes faith. That is believing the unseen (Hebrews 11:1^{xix}). When the angel appeared to Paul on that boat I don't think Paul could physically see much of anything in the darkness and the driving rain. But Paul believed the word from that Lord that they would all be safe.

Now if it was me, I'd have thought that it was nice that we'd all survived, but here we are on this island. I'm wet and cold. Glad we made it and for the fire, but I'm still cold and wet and now I'm snake bit. And maybe that is how you feel today. I got through this thing, scraped enough together to pay my taxes, but there is still this issue in my life that robs me of joy. How can I be of good cheer? That rings hollow because of the pain of some situation you are facing (Proverbs 18:12^{xx}).

Just look at what happened to Paul. God turned that whole thing around so that the island heard the message of Jesus' salvation. God is not done with us as long as we are still breathing. Don't give in to the devil's temptation to quit praying and worshipping God with your whole heart.

The greatest victory out of the greatest darkness the world had ever seen was the very thing we celebrated last Sunday, Jesus' resurrection. The disciples' years of following their Master and hoping for the end of Roman occupation and then watching Him be brutally scourged and die the torturous death of the cross had snuffed out their hopes. They were hiding out while hoping they weren't the next to die in the same way; and then suddenly there He was standing in their midst. Our sin debt was paid. "Peace to you!" He said and showed them His hands and feet because they are the receipt for our salvation (Luke 24:36-39^{xxi}).

Peace to you! Dear brothers and sisters, peace in the midst of the storms of life you are facing because your biggest need has been taken care of. You have been made right with God. Your eternity is secured. You have a glorious future waiting for you that is beyond your greatest hopes (Hebrews 11:16^{xxii}). **Whatever you face today you face with Jesus at your side and in your heart. He can turn around the greatest trials to be some of your greatest victories.** He can take what the enemy of your soul means for evil and use it for good. But don't give up faith and hope when your long trial seems to end by running aground on some reef, or even when a viper bites. God is still God, and He is still sovereign. Instead, open your spiritual eyes to see how God is going to use it and then walk in expectant hope (Romans 8:32^{xxiii}).

I'm really looking forward to what God is going to do through this body of believers this year and the years to come. We may face difficulties, but we are not going to just wander along without a meaningful direction or without Jesus presence with us. We are going to seek God's direction, stay in His Word, watch where He is at work and join Him. We are going to stand by one another through the storms and know Jesus will see us through to victory (Habakkuk 3:17-19^{xxiv}). Amen?

Questions

- 1 What was the situation?
- 2 Why didn't they kill the prisoners?
- 3 What nautical term does Hebrews use for Jesus? Application?
- 4 What reasons did Paul have to doubt? Believe?
- 5 How did God turn it around?
- 6 What was the fruit from all the trials?
- 7 What gift did God use to affect the island?
- 8 What can we learn from this passage regarding a series of trials that discourage us?
- 9 How can we find encouragement from God?
- 10 How can we encourage one another?

i Hebrews 6:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

ii Deuteronomy 31:8 (ESV)

⁸ It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed."

iii Acts 27:3 (ESV)

³ The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.

iv Hebrews 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

v John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

vi Hebrews 6:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

vii Genesis 50:20 (ESV)

²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

viii Isaiah 43:2 (ESV)

² When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

ix 1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

x Mark 5:1-2 (ESV)

¹ They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.

² And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit.

xi Romans 12:3 (ESV)

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

xii Psalm 121:3 (ESV)

³ He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

xiii Mark 16:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."

xiv 2 Samuel 22:3 (ESV)

³ my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence.

xv Luke 1:37 (ESV)

³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

xvi Matthew 17:20 (ESV)

²⁰ He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."

xvii 1 Corinthians 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

^{xviii} **John 16:33 (ESV)**

³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

^{xix} **Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)**

¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

^{xx} **Proverbs 13:12 (ESV)**

¹² Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

^{xxi} **Luke 24:36-39 (ESV)**

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!” ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

^{xxii} **Hebrews 11:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

^{xxiii} **Romans 8:32 (ESV)**

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

^{xxiv} **Habakkuk 3:17-19 (ESV)**

¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.